

INFRACTION DISTRACTIONS



SOUNDING THE ALARM ON THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S CONTRADICTORY ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS

Evidence of the tobacco industry's damaging effect on the planet is vast and growing, despite efforts to communicate otherwise through its highly visible and influential cigarette package designs.¹

Misleading environmental claims and the tactic of corporate social responsibility (CSR)—exploited by the tobacco industry to counter unfavorable perceptions and distract consumer attention from societal issues such as human rights violations, harmful labor practices, and negative environmental impact²—are debunked in these examples from the **Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS)**.



CLAIM:

- Symbols encouraging responsible disposal—like these, found on packs from Brazil, Mexico, and Pakistan—falsely imply an anti-waste/litter tobacco industry stance.

FACTS³:

- Approximately 65% of smokers discard cigarette butts improperly, contributing to ~4.5 trillion cigarettes littered into the environment every year—each one taking ~10 years to decompose.
- Nicotine and chemicals leach into surrounding ecosystems as cigarettes decompose: one EPA study concluded that, when cigarette butts are soaked in freshwater for 96 hours, approximately half the fish will die.
- Most commercial cigarettes contain a cellulose acetate filter—a poorly degradable microplastic that contributes to environmental contamination.



¹ Lempert LK, Glantz S. Packaging colour research by tobacco companies: the pack as a product characteristic. *Tob Control*. 2017;26(3):307–15.

² Hirschhorn N. Corporate social responsibility and the tobacco industry: hope or hype? *Tob Control* 2004;13:447-453.

³ World Health Organization. Q&A: World no tobacco day 2022 [Internet]. WHO; 2022 [cited 2022Apr29].

Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/q-a-world-no-tobacco-day-2022>

CLAIM:

- The **Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)** mark suggests a sustainability standard that **obscures the tobacco industry's key role in deforestation.**

FACTS³:

- Approximately **200,000 hectares of land is cleared annually** for tobacco growing and curing.
- An estimated 1.5 billion hectares of (mainly tropical) forests have been lost worldwide since the 1970s due to tobacco, contributing to up to **20% of annual greenhouse gas increase.**
- Tobacco farming accounts for about **5% of average national deforestation**, disproportionately affecting tobacco growing regions of the world, including Southern Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South America and the Caribbean.



CLAIM:

- Containing the phrase **“Mexico always clean; you can use this box as an ashtray,”** this pack made of metal evokes greenwashing by subtly connoting upcycling—a current trend.

FACTS³:

- Deceitful tactics are used by the tobacco industry to greenwash its reputation and portray itself as a sustainable and eco-friendly industry—meanwhile, globally, the **approximate weight of waste generated annually** from the overall tobacco life cycle is **approximately 25 million metric tons.**
- The intent of the industry's self-reported data is to **mislead the public** into minimizing the negative effects of tobacco growing on the environment and communities of countries worldwide.



CLAIM:

- Tobacco **product packaging** may employ earth tone colors or phrases like “natural” and “additive free” to **evoke a misleading sense of pureness**—at odds with the highly mechanized and pollutive reality of industrialized farming/manufacturing.

FACTS³:

- Tobacco production contributes almost **84 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent emissions annually**—akin to 280,000 rockets launched into space.
- Fertile land that could be used to grow nutritious crops is used for tobacco. The soil depletion caused by tobacco growing further **contributes to food insecurity** and nutrition challenges.
- Marketing labels like “natural” or “organic” can decrease harm perceptions—however, in addition to the toxic health effects of cigarette smoke, **a tobacco farmer may absorb as much nicotine per day as found in 50 cigarettes.**



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